

10-31-2022

Searching transnational relations between Moluccans in the Netherlands and the Moluccas

Fridus Steijlen

KITLV, Leiden and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, steijlen@kitlv.nl

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/wacana>



Part of the [Other Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Steijlen, Fridus (2022) "Searching transnational relations between Moluccans in the Netherlands and the Moluccas," *Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia*: Vol. 23: No. 3, Article 3.

DOI: [10.17510/wacana.v23i3.1002](https://doi.org/10.17510/wacana.v23i3.1002)

Available at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/wacana/vol23/iss3/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty of Humanities at UI Scholars Hub. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia* by an authorized editor of UI Scholars Hub.

Searching transnational relations between Moluccans in the Netherlands and the Moluccas

FRIDUS STEIJLEN

ABSTRACT

This article deals with the transnational relations between Moluccans in the Netherlands and the Moluccas. Former Moluccan colonial soldiers and their families were forced to go to the Netherlands because of political developments in Indonesia after the transfer of sovereignty in 1949. They hoped to return soon to an independent South Moluccan Republic but, more than seventy years later, they still live in the Netherlands. This article first describes how and why Moluccans came to the Netherlands and began to build a community. At the very beginning, the foundations for a transnational relationship were laid through village-based organizations and political organizations. After decades living in exile, the political dimension of the transnational relation assumed great prominence for most Moluccans, later to make place for a more varied transnational relation. The political ideal changed and its priority on the Moluccan “public agenda” dropped until in 1999 a new conflict flared up in the Moluccas. A renewed, altered political transnational relation emerged. The transnational relationship also simultaneously developed in more diverse ways, via development projects, cultural exchange, and the like. By this time, the position of Moluccans in the Moluccas in this transnational relation had also changed.

KEYWORDS

Moluccans; Netherlands; Indonesia; RMS; social media; transnational relations; diaspora; exile; development projects.

FRIDUS STEIJLEN is emeritus senior researcher at the KITLV/Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies in Leiden and professor Moluccan migration and culture in comparative perspective at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. His expertise is on post-colonial migration from Indonesia to the Netherlands, decolonization, and daily life in present-day Indonesia. Fridus Steijlen can be reached at: steijlen@kitlv.nl.

© 2022 Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Indonesia

FRIDUS STEIJLEN | DOI: 10.17510/wacana.v23i3.1002.

TO THE NETHERLANDS: IN EXILE¹

In 1951 a total of almost 12,900 Moluccans came to the Netherlands. The majority consisted of 3,500 Moluccan soldiers and their families. They were accompanied by a small number of Moluccans who had served the Netherlands Royal Navy, commandos, police recruits, and civilians.² In 1962 a new group of Moluccans arrived from Netherlands New Guinea when the Netherlands handed West Papua over to Indonesia.³ Their stay in the Netherlands was intended to be temporary; no more than about six months was the idea. The reason for their coming arrival was connected to political developments in the United States of Indonesia, the Republik Indonesia Serikat (RIS), in 1950. It was the collapse of the RIS in 1950 which motivated the proclamation of an independent South Moluccan Republic, Republik Maluku Selatan (RMS), on 25 April, problematizing the demobilization of Moluccan soldiers who still were under Dutch responsibility while the colonial army was disbanded. To understand the tensions and the proclamation of the RMS, it is necessary to make a brief journey back to colonial times when Moluccans, especially Christian Moluccans, were privileged supporters of the Dutch colonial power.

The Moluccan Islands, the only islands in which spices like cloves and nutmeg grew, played a key role in the entry of Dutch colonialism in the Indonesian Archipelago. Competing with the English and Portuguese, wielding violence the Dutch trading company, the United East India Company (Verenigde Oost Indische Company, VOC), established a monopoly on the trade of the Moluccan spices at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Shortly afterwards, the VOC expanded and began to exploit other parts of the archipelago. It established a power centre in Java, called Batavia, present-day Jakarta. Although the VOC was officially a trading company, in its structure it resembled a quasi-colonial state with military power exerted through strings of fortifications built throughout the archipelago. It was a form of colonization in which local elites were forced to cooperate with the Dutch power.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the VOC was declared bankrupt and its possessions were taken over by the then Dutch state. In 1813, when the Netherlands became a kingdom, the Indonesian Archipelago was considered part of the kingdom, initially even the personal possession of the king. Henceforth, the Dutch occupied territory was called the Netherlands Indies. At that point, not all of what is present-day Indonesia was then controlled by the Dutch. In order to expand control over the archipelago a colonial army, initially as part of the army of the Netherlands later as separate colonial entity under responsibility of the East Indies government, carried out wars to “pacify” the whole territory.

The colonial army, the Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger (Royal Netherlands Indies Army, KNIL), was supposed to consist partly of European

¹ I would like to thank Wim Manuhutu for his comments on the draft version of this article and Rosemary Robson for her thorough language editing.

² Henk Smeets and Fridus Steijlen (2006: 76) and Nanneke Wigard and Jim Worung (2021: 204).

³ See also Tonny van der Mee and Domingo Tomasouw 2005.

soldiers and partly of indigenous personnel. The ratio established itself at 1:4. Then most of the indigenous personnel consisted of Javanese.⁴ However, during the nineteenth century, Moluccans, or Ambonese as they were called, emerged as the most loyal and reliable soldiers. Especially in the early stages, Menadonese from the northern part of Sulawesi also made up the rank and file with the Ambonese. This image of an ethnic soldier was based on the idea that the history of the relationship between the Dutch and Moluccans went back to two strands which emerged at the beginnings of Dutch colonialism when the VOC cooperated with Moluccan sultanates to defeat the Portuguese and the idea that Moluccans were culturally closer to the Dutch because of their conversion to Christianity. In fact, this image was valid for only one half of the Moluccan population.⁵ Although this image of the ethnic soldier also related to other Christian groups, like the Menadonese and Timorese, the Ambonese (Moluccans) emerged as the personification of the loyal indigenous soldier, in the process creating a selective image of a shared history.⁶ At first there was not much enthusiasm among Moluccan youngsters to serve in the colonial army. Extra bonuses for village heads and privileges in the form of more money, boots, and better education for their children were required to persuade Moluccans to sign up. By the time the wars in Aceh ended at the beginning of the twentieth century, Moluccans were considered the most loyal and the fiercest fighters in the KNIL. Besides these ethnic soldiers, a large number Moluccans supported the Dutch colonial power through positions as teachers and preachers. Despite this show of loyalty, many Moluccan intellectuals also became part of the emerging Indonesian nationalist movement. Among them was A.J. Patty who organized Moluccans into the Sarekat Ambon.⁷

The pro-Dutch image of Moluccan colonial soldiers prevented the Japanese releasing them after they occupied the archipelago and took all military personnel prisoner-of-war. Contrary to, for example, the Javanese colonial soldiers, Moluccan KNIL soldier were not set free because the Japanese expected they would try to oust them.

After the capitulation of Japan on 15 August, 1945, and the proclamation of the Republik Indonesia (RI) two days later, a new period of recruitment of Moluccans into the colonial army commenced.⁸ The Dutch government refused to acknowledge the Indonesian proclamation and tried to re-establish its colonial power. In Eastern Indonesia, among other places in the Moluccan Islands, the restoration of Dutch power had already been achieved in the last months of 1945, because the Australian troops who were responsible for taking over power in Eastern Indonesia allowed the Dutch colonial power to follow in their footsteps. There was a pro-independent Indonesia political movement and pro-RI, but the resurgent Dutch power, and with it the return

⁴ C.A. Heshusius (1978: 11), see also Steijlen 2015.

⁵ Richard Chauvel (1980, 1990).

⁶ Steijlen 2015.

⁷ Chauvel 1990: 71-149.

⁸ About the position of Moluccans in that period see Gert Oostindie and Fridus Steijlen 2021.

of KNIL troops, dominated the political atmosphere.⁹ The KNIL, which had to be re-formed, began to recruit new Moluccan youngsters into the army. In the islands of Java and Sumatra, the situation was diametrically opposed. Here British troops were responsible for taking power over from the Japanese. They experienced fiercer opposition from the Indonesian nationalist side as well as disturbances caused by such groups as Indo-European and Moluccan youngsters and former POWs. Here, at the core of the Indonesian nationalist movement, they pretty much succeeded in keeping out the Dutch until a diplomatic trajectory between the Dutch and Indonesians had been worked out in Linggadjati in the early months of 1946.

After that, Dutch troops began to land also in the islands of Java and Sumatra and new KNIL troops were also mobilized. In the ensuing war Moluccans fought on both sides. It is important to note that by the Dutch they were again seen as the most loyal indigenous soldiers, a view held by both the Dutch and the Indonesians. It would be fair to say that the Dutch used the military mainly to force the Indonesians to accept the Dutch terms for independence. This view envisioned a shrinking Republik Indonesia and the establishment of other states as the Dutch thought a federal system would be best for Indonesia.¹⁰

This diplomatic trajectory eventually led to a transfer of sovereignty to the Indonesian federation on 27 December, 1949. The federation inherited the tensions inherent between unitarist and federalists. However, by January 1950, the federal system had already begun to break up. The federal state of Pasundan, West Java, was already thinking of merging with the Republik Indonesia. To try to prevent this, a coup d'état was launched by a former Dutch commando officer, Raymond Westerling, who was infamous for his cruel depredations in Sulawesi.¹¹ Westerling, operating under the name of APRA (Angkatan Perang Ratu Adil), mobilized the support of the Moluccan troops who had joined him earlier in Sulawesi. The coup failed. Westerling fled to the Netherlands, but more importantly to this paper: the pro-Dutch image of Moluccan KNIL soldiers had once again been reinforced as the APRA was framed as a Dutch attempt to intervene in Indonesian affairs.

In March came an almost repeat performance. As a reaction to discussions on merging the Federal State of East Indonesia, the largest federated state, established as the first federal state by the Dutch, of which the South Moluccas was part, with the RI. Led by a former KNIL captain, Andi Azis, military troops made a failed attempt to take the capital, Makassar, and combat the Indonesian troops being dispatched from Java. Many Moluccan KNIL soldiers, awaiting transportation back to the Moluccas to be demobilized, joined in this revolt, which eventually failed.

⁹ Chauvel 1990.

¹⁰ The series of changes in the shrinking borders of the Republic Indonesia after each agreement with the Netherlands is graphically shown on a series of maps in the Museum Fort Vredeburg in Yogyakarta. Inspired by this series maps, they are also presented in Eveline Buchheim et al. (2022: 285).

¹¹ See W. IJzereef 1984.

In the meantime, in the central Moluccas unrest grew. Federalists feared a complete breakdown of the federation and the emergence of a Unitary State of Indonesia dominated by nationalists from Java. The payment of the price for their earlier support of Dutch colonialism loomed. To escape this uncertain future, the chairs of the South Moluccan regional council were forced to proclaim an independent South Moluccan Republic, the RMS, by KNIL troops. Key actors behind this were Ir J. Manusama and Mr Dr Ch. Soumokil. The first RMS troops were former KNIL soldiers already stationed in the Moluccas. The Indonesian government refused to acknowledge the RMS and invaded the islands after diplomatic attempts to disband the RMS were abandoned. The RMS government fled to the interior of the Island of Seram, where a core of the movement, among them Soumokil, who had taken over presidency in 1952, remained active until they were arrested by Indonesian troops. Manusama had left Seram in 1952 and arrived in the Netherlands in 1953, charged with the task of organizing external support for the struggle.¹²

The proclamation of the RMS and the ensuing military confrontation in the islands complicated the process of demobilizing those Moluccan KNIL soldiers who were still stationed outside their home islands. An overwhelming majority of them supported the RMS proclamation and wanted to be transported to RMS territory to support the movement. This was unacceptable to the Indonesian government because this would have only strengthened the RMS. It was also unacceptable to the Dutch government because it did not acknowledge the RMS and was wary of upsetting its relationship with the Indonesian government.

The KNIL soldiers were the responsibility of the Dutch and, under KNIL regulations, they had the right to be taken back to their place of their choice. Fearing that the Dutch authorities would demobilize them in Java, where they had been concentrated since August 1950, they sent a delegation to the Netherlands for discussions with the Dutch government. This delegation, known as the Aponno delegation, after the Sergeant-Major F.A. Aponno, managed to win a court decision prohibiting the Dutch government from demobilizing the Moluccan soldiers in Indonesian-controlled territories. It also basically prevented them from taking them to the Moluccas if they were averse to this idea, because the islands were controlled by Indonesia.

After weighty deliberations, the Moluccan soldiers were temporarily shipped to the Netherlands under threat of being summarily discharged if they did not follow orders. The idea of the Dutch government was that Moluccans would have a cooling off period and could then return. The idea of the Moluccan leaders was that the Dutch government would transport them to the Moluccas, more specifically a free Moluccas, as befitted the Dutch government's responsibility as their employer.

¹² See Bung Penonton (1977: 212-232) for a detailed timeline.

TEMPORARILY TO THE NETHERLANDS, 1950s, ORGANIZING LINKS VIA *KUMPULAN*

In the Netherlands the Moluccan soldiers were presented a jarring surprise: they were discharged forthwith from the army and, given the temporality of their stay, housed communally in barracks. The body responsible for the care of the Moluccans was a governmental commission called the Commissariaat Ambonezen Zorg¹³ (CAZ, Commissariat Ambonese Care), operating under the Ministry of Welfare. During the first five years, they were fully taken care of (food, clothing, fuel) by the Dutch government and doled out pocket money for cigarettes and other extras. This policy changed in 1956 because more Moluccans were being employed and earning an income and it was considered unfair that they should benefit from a wage as well as being fully taken care of by the government. Consequently, from August 1956 Moluccans had to find their own living or rely on benefits from the government. In 1960 the Dutch government decided to build special wards for the Moluccans in small villages, for the dual purpose of improving their living conditions, and bringing them closer to work opportunities. There was some resistance because some Moluccan organizations considered this new policy a sign of the Dutch government was preparing to evade its responsibility towards Moluccans and the latter were afraid that, if they were to move to more permanent housing, this would invalidate their claim to be taken back home.¹⁴

The Moluccans in the barracks began to organize themselves, thereby laying the foundations of the diaspora community. Most were Protestant Christians and the Moluccan ministers who had come with the soldiers founded a Moluccan evangelical church, separate from both the evangelical church in the Moluccas and the same church in the Netherlands. Although the church experienced splits in the years which followed, the Moluccan evangelical church was an important factor in maintaining Moluccan identity. Besides this function, the church played an important role in connecting the Moluccans with the homeland because most of the church organizations supported the ideal of an independent state, the RMS. The church bestowed a spiritual cohesion and gave consolation as the pastors compared the fate of Moluccans to that of the Jews in the wilderness.¹⁵ With the new church came choirs, youth, and women organizations. Sport clubs were also organized in the barracks. To ensure proper representation, a camp council was set up in each camp. Originally intended to represent the camp inhabitants in their dealings with the camp authorities, they were gradually integrated into a nationwide network of Moluccan representation and advocacy. In the very earliest years, some Moluccan organizations had already been established to represent the interests of the Moluccans in their dealings with the national authorities. The first of these was the CAZ. Because the CAZ functionaries did

¹³ In the colonial era and the 1950s, Moluccans were called Ambonese after the main island of Ambon. In the 1960s this changed to South Moluccans, with a nod to the political ideas of RMS. In the 1980s, this was changed back to Moluccans.

¹⁴ Smeets and Steijlen (2006: Chapters 5 and 6).

¹⁵ Smeets and Steijlen (2006: 99-103); Redactieteam Gedenkboek 1989; Melly Metiarj 2021.

not communicate directly with individual Moluccans and instead negotiated every change in policy with the national Moluccan interest organizations, the degree of organization among Moluccans grew very tight knit and the government chose to make itself dependent on maintaining a good relationship with these Moluccan representatives.¹⁶

The relationship with the Moluccas was shaped in two ways. As part of the nascent organizational structure of the diaspora community, Moluccans originating from the same villages organized themselves into *kumpulan*, village organizations. Later they were also organized into *kumpulan* based on islands if there were not enough descendants from the same village. In camp life, the *kumpulan* could replace the functionaries or institutions of the village of origin in life-cycle events, like marriage, but they were also instrumental in solving conflicts, as Tamme Wittermans, an anthropologist who did fieldwork in some Moluccan camps in 1952/1953 observed.¹⁷ Another function of the *kumpulan* was to prepare support for the village of origin should the Moluccans in the Netherlands be able to return. *Kumpulan* collected money to buy such items as ecclesiastical attributes to take home as soon as they were poised to return to the Moluccas.

Besides this representative relationship with their villages of origin, there was an emotional connection: the unquenchable longing to return home to the Moluccas. For the vast majority the homeland which was theirs was the RMS. It was not defined in these political terms only for a small minority. Unfortunately, any immediate return was out of the question because they were dependent on the Dutch government for this to happen and they were also subject to social control by the RMS-minded majority who exerted pressure on them not to express any open misgivings about the RMS. Nevertheless, the emotional and mental connection with the Moluccas was palpable in daily life. Wittermans, for example, observed that Moluccans apologized for holding parties and celebrating weddings. It was not the time to dance and drink while people in the Moluccas were suffering under miserable conditions.¹⁸ Of course, they did dance and drink at parties, but there was an underlying consciousness of how much better their own situation was compared to that in the Moluccas. Of course, this was based on a hypothetical assumption what the situation in the Moluccas was.

Contact with the Moluccas was problematic because any communications were few and far between. Most communication took place via letters. Only the representatives of the RMS government and its Dutch supporters had any radio contact. The RMS representatives, organized into a Bureau Zuid Molukken (BZM, Bureau South Moluccas), consisted of a group intellectuals and students resident in the Netherlands at the time of the RMS proclamation. They were supported in different ways by right wing Dutch organizations which were opposed to the decolonization of Indonesia and/or advocated

¹⁶ T. Wittermans (1955, 1991).

¹⁷ Wittermans (1991: 33).

¹⁸ Wittermans (1991: 73).

the idea that the Netherlands owed a debt of honour to the Moluccans as former allies in the colony. The information provided through these channels were of course RMS filtered. The main task of the BZM and the RMS-oriented interest organizations in the Netherlands was to drum up support for the RMS guerrillas in Seram. This support was in the form of attracting public attention to the situation and obtaining diplomatic recognition and, if possible, seeking material support.¹⁹

Not all organizations representing Moluccan interests on a national level supported the RMS. After just a few months in the Netherlands, conflicts between Moluccans from the central Moluccan Islands, Ambon, and Lease, and Moluccans from the South-eastern Kei Islands led to a divide. A group of Keiese Moluccans organized themselves into an interest organization for the South-eastern Islands, the *Kepentingan Rajat Pulau Pulau Terselatan* (KRPPT). Although the direct reason for clashes between South-eastern and central Moluccans appeared innocent enough, the real cause of the conflict was the dominant attitude displayed by the central Moluccans.

This was not the case with a new organization of Moluccans from the Island of Seram, the *Gerakan Nusa Ina* (GNI, Movement of the Mother Island), which emerged some years later in 1954. According to messages from RMS representatives, some villages in the Island of Seram were destroyed by the Indonesian army when it invaded Seram. However, letters from relatives in these villages revealed that it was RMS soldiers who had laid waste to the villages. A group of Seramese Moluccans turned their backs on the existing pressure groups because they felt they had been deceived by the RMS leaders. Thereafter they established the GNI. They, like the KRPPT, rejected the RMS. The difference lay in the fact that unlike the KRPPT, the GNI did not want to rely on the active involvement of the Dutch government in any attempts to bring them home. They took their fate into their own hands and some of members did manage to return to the Moluccas in 1962. Before they could return to the Island of Seram they had to wait in Jakarta until in 1964 when Soumokil and the last remaining RMS guerrillas were arrested.²⁰

Besides the GNI some other organizations also organized their own returns to Indonesia and the Moluccas in the 1950s and 1960s. The Dutch authorities supported them but, because of diplomatic conflict between the Netherlands and Indonesia, the Moluccans had to deal with the Indonesian authorities themselves. The crucible of this diplomatic conflict was the Dutch retention of West Papua, excluding it from the decolonization process as its last colony, Netherlands New Guinea, in the region. Indonesia claimed sovereignty over West Papua as part of the former colony.

How should we understand the transnational relationship between Moluccans in the Netherlands and the Moluccas during this first stay in the Netherlands? Upon arrival, most Moluccans considered themselves citizens of the RMS, even though the RMS was not recognized. Their connection with

¹⁹ D. Bosscher and B. Waaldijk 1985.

²⁰ Steijlen (1996a: 101-103).

the Moluccas was layered. They felt a connection to their villages of origin which, as said, led to the establishment of *kumpulan* to act as representatives of village officials and institutions. To some extent the *kumpulan* helped to translate the structure of the village of origin into their diaspora situation. Organizing themselves into *kumpulan* connected them to their village of origin in yet another way; it was part of the preparation to return and be able to bring something with them from their diaspora home. The connection with and longing for the village of origin was common to all Moluccans in the Netherlands.

This differed for links with the second layer of connection: the broader region of origin. As said, upon arrival the majority at least sympathized with the RMS and felt that the next stop, after a temporary stay in the Netherlands, would be RMS territory. It could be said that for Moluccans arriving in the Netherlands their community was an imagined RMS nation. Actual conflicts of different kinds between Moluccans from different islands showed the vulnerability of this imagined community. It became a contested vision for some because they considered it dominated by central Moluccans, while other lost their faith in this community because they felt they had been hoodwinked by its leaders.

PROLONGED TEMPORALITY 1960/1970s, RMS DOMINANCE

The relocation of Moluccans from the barracks to the special wards took more than fifteen years. Some of the transfers ran smoothly, while others were disrupted by confrontations with the police.²¹ The socio-economic position of Moluccans improved only slowly. The Moluccan institutions remained strong in the wards. Although the camp council was replaced by a ward council, their system of representation with the Dutch authorities remained the same, even after the CAZ was replaced by a Moluccan Department in the Ministry of Welfare.

An important reason for the delay in any improvement of the socio-economic position of the Moluccans was that they themselves, as did the government, still considered their residence in the Netherlands temporary. What they did disagree on was the next step. Most of the Moluccans were convinced that their temporary residence could end only after the RMS had been achieved. However, the Dutch government did not see assisting in the realization of an RMS any of its business. In fact, it considered this an internal Indonesian issue. There were also many Moluccans who did not support the RMS but nevertheless continued to think of their stay in the Netherlands as a temporary one. However, by now any return to the Moluccas had become complicated for two reasons. On the one hand they were waiting for the

²¹ The most violent confrontation was in Vaassen in 1976 when armed police with armoured vehicles demolished barracks which had not been intended to be demolished at that moment. One of the camps, Camp Lunetten in Vught, was never fully evacuated. A group of residents refused to move out and eventually the government allowed them stay in the camp after the barrack buildings had been replaced by small brick houses.

Dutch government to take the initiative; on the other the latter was not on speaking terms with Indonesia. Even after the diplomatic relations between Indonesia and the Netherlands improved in the second half of the 1960s when Netherlands New Guinea had been handed over to Indonesia in 1962 and the Netherlands had initiated international financial support for the New Order regime in the wake of the attempted coup in 1965, the return of the Moluccans was not high on the diplomatic agenda.

Two developments influenced the way most Moluccans defined their relationship with the Moluccas. The first was the ebbing away of RMS resistance in the Moluccas. In 1963 Soumokil and the last RMS fighters in Seram were arrested. Soumokil was sentenced to death and the execution was carried out in 1966. After his death his widow, Nonja Soumokil, and son, Tommy, came to the Netherlands. Here they became personifications of Soumokil's RMS struggle and a source of inspiration for RMS sympathizers. Manusama, who had come to the Netherlands in the 1950s to lead the political activities from here, succeeded Soumokil as president-in-exile.

With the establishment of a RMS government in exile without an identifiable RMS stronghold in the Moluccas, the whole RMS-movement went into exile. Importantly this changed the character of the movement in the Netherlands. So long as the RMS leadership remained in the Moluccas, the task of the RMS movement in the Netherlands was to organize support. Now the task of the RMS sympathizers in the Netherlands was to re-introduce the RMS into the Moluccas. The movement changed from a support nationalism to an "ex patria nationalism".²²

The arrival of Nonja Soumokil was a signal for those second-generation Moluccans who were politically active to push ahead with their cause. They had already been radicalizing and on the evening of Nonja Soumokil's arrival, a group of young Moluccans tried to set fire to the Indonesian embassy. This was the first act in a series of radical actions. In 1970 it was announced that the Indonesian president, Suharto, was going to visit the Netherlands. In protest thirty-three Moluccan youngsters occupied the residence of the Indonesian ambassador for a day. During the first half of the 1970s, attacks were made on Indonesian consulates and Garuda offices. In 1975 a group of Moluccan youngsters were arrested for planning to attack the royal palace and take the queen hostage. In December 1975 a train was highjacked followed by a hostage-taking in the Indonesian consulate in Amsterdam a few days later. Four people were killed or died during these actions. In 1977 a combined assault was staged by high-jacking a train and occupying a primary school. These acts were ended by a Dutch military force which killed six Moluccan hostage-takers and two hostages. The last hostage-taking was executed in 1978 in the administrative centre of the province of Drenthe. One hostage was killed at the beginning of the action and one died of the wounds sustained during the liberation action by Dutch forces, which happened within forty-eight hours.²³

²² Steijlen 1996a, 2010.

²³ Steijlen (1996a: Chapter 6), 1996b, 2001b; Bootsma 2015.

The motivation behind these radical actions was to attract the world's attention to the political ideals of the Moluccans. The activists felt the necessity to do something because, according to their sources in the Moluccas, suppression by Indonesia was growing harsher. In their radicalization they were inspired by liberation movements like the Palestinians and Black civil right movements in the United States. One important condition which enabled this radicalization process was the lack of any clear RMS leadership in the Moluccas. Although when he was still in Seram Soumokil had assumed legendary proportions for the Moluccans in the Netherlands, his successors in the RMS leadership were also in exile and therefore vulnerable to criticism. They had less control over the younger generations. To muddy the waters even more, competing RMS governments began to emerge ramping up competition between rival RMS fractions.

Just as the radicalization process was beginning to take shape an alternative initiative came up; one which looked for ways to help the Moluccas develop in a non-political way. This was Rela'69. The idea behind Rela'69 was that Moluccans from the Netherlands could be important to the Moluccas through the provision of small-scale development aid. This was a sensitive issue because it was not welcomed by political diehards. They considered the Moluccas to be occupied territory which had to be freed from Indonesia first. The impact of Rela'69 was minimal because its members were few in numbers and most of the community did not support their ideas. Nevertheless, the organization, however was a foretaste of new ideas.

The radicalization process in the 1960s and 1970s indicates that large sections of the Moluccan community in the Netherlands still considered themselves members of the imagined RMS community. They also felt a responsibility to help this community primarily by liberating them from Indonesia. The upshot was that the imagined community was very much politically dominated. Only small groups within the Moluccan community felt able to look for alternatives. There were some sub-groups, like South-eastern Moluccans and some of the Muslim minority who failed to connect to the radical and/or political RMS movements. Besides these there were Moluccans who looked for alternative ways to provide development aid.

KEY MOMENT: THE MID-1970s, REPOSITIONING AND NEW RELATIONS

When the radicalization was at its height, several developments which would redefine relations with the Moluccas were underway. The first to emerge was a sub-wave of thinking. In line with the ideas behind Rela'69, Moluccans began to rethink their relationship with the Moluccas. They called for a reformulation of the RMS ideology and interpreted the proclamation of the RMS in the context of the decolonization process of Indonesia. To their way of thinking, it should not be the Moluccans in the Netherlands who should decide about the future of the Moluccas, but the people in the Moluccas themselves. The youth organizations developing these ideas were considered progressive and it was they who sought cooperation with Indonesian exiles in the Netherlands

who were opposed to the Suharto regime. Their reasoning was that, before anything else could happen, the military dictatorship in Indonesia had to be eradicated leaving the people in the Moluccas free to speak out about their future. The people behind these organizations came from the same circles and networks as those who were involved in the acts of violence. Although they were not large in numbers, they provoked new discussions about the RMS and the relationship with the Moluccas.

In tandem with this political rethinking, awareness about social problems in the community began to grow. In the shadow of the political orientation of the majority, hard drug abuse among youngsters had been increasing enormously, not to mention unemployment and an addiction to gambling. These pressing social problems required a solution before any political goal could be realized. Many political activists became seriously involved in projects fighting drug abuse, tackling unemployment and other social issues.

The context within which the Moluccan community in the Netherlands operated also changed in the 1970s. From the beginning, both the Dutch government and the Moluccans themselves considered their residence temporary. There were some efforts to improve the integration of Moluccans in the Netherlands, but most of these initiatives were oriented towards participating in Dutch society. Building a relationship with Dutch society was not a prime concern of these efforts. Only in the second half of the 1960s did the Dutch government begin to rethink this relationship and opened opportunities for local Moluccan communities to acquire funding for a community centre. Although meant to improve their relationship with Dutch society, these Moluccan community centres had the opposite effect. They became centres where Moluccans organized themselves *vis-à-vis* Dutch society. This changed only slowly during the 1970s.

The occupation of the Indonesian ambassador's residence in 1970 came as a shock to the Dutch authorities. They suddenly realized that not only the relationship with Dutch society needed attention but something also had to be done about the relationship with Indonesia or the Moluccas. This required the intervention of the Indonesian government which was not really falling over itself to solve the problems of the Dutch government. Diplomatic negotiations led to an agreement between the Indonesian and Dutch governments which contained several projects designed to improve or change the relationship between Moluccans in the Netherlands and the Moluccas. The agreement was signed in 1975. Part of the agreement consisted of arrangements for the repatriation of Moluccans to Indonesia. Elderly Moluccans who were retired and had Indonesian citizenship could return home in the framework of this agreement and were given support by both governments. Another arrangement, with even more impact on the relationship, dealt with organized trips to Indonesia and the Moluccas to give Dutch Moluccans the opportunity to see what was happening in the Moluccas. These were called orientation trips. That Indonesia was becoming more open and this allowed Dutch Moluccans to travel to Indonesia which happened to coincide with the growing wish

among Dutch Moluccans to visit the Moluccas. In the 1960s some Moluccans had already been to visit their relatives in their villages of origin, but this was always done keeping a low profile because it was critiqued as visiting occupied territory. Another obstacle was that whoever wanted to visit the Moluccas had to have a Dutch or Indonesian passport and most Moluccans were stateless at that time.

Public figures in the Moluccan community were invited to join the first orientation trips. They were heavily criticized and threatened with violence. Nevertheless, they did pave the way because in their wake more and more Moluccans took the opportunity to visit the Moluccas. Some went on their own initiative, at their own expense, while others went in the framework of special programmes called job-experience travel and package tours. Young Moluccans, whether stateless or not, could visit Indonesia and the Moluccas as a group. They were monitored while they were in Indonesia and, before leaving, some of the groups received some introductory courses about what to expect and how to behave. All these trips expanded the relationship with the Moluccas in the sense it was acceptable to go and the number of trips increased as the years passed. In the 1980s, more and more Moluccans could visit the Moluccas because their economic position had improved and, since 1986, members of the first generation had been given an extra allowance annually, enough to cover a return ticket to the Moluccas,

The new relationship with the Moluccas led to a reorientation in the relationship. Earlier, for the majority, this had been dominated by the RMS ideals in the sense that the imagined community was primarily considered to be based on the RMS. Now the direct connection with relatives and villages of origin replaced this political imagined community with an imagined community based on historical and family relations. The political dimension in the relationship afforded by the RMS was still present but this became of increasingly secondary importance in the sense that Dutch Moluccans considered the RMS struggle as a struggle for the right of self-determination of the people on the Moluccas. Their own future did not depend on the realization of a RMS; their idea was that they could be part of the Moluccan community in the Moluccas but remain in the Netherlands. As a result, their position in the Netherlands increasingly resembled that of a migrant not an exile. For a long time, the discourse on their residence remained that they were only temporarily in the Netherlands, nevertheless by now they were beginning to invest in their future in the Netherlands.²⁴

Imbued with the same feeling of involvement and care for their relatives in the Moluccas, the number of small development aid projects increased. Among others agents, as existing institutions connecting Moluccans in the Netherlands and in the Moluccas, *kumpulan* became active in this field. Alongside the *kumpulan*, new initiatives were directed towards infrastructural improvement in villages or the restoration of churches. As well as projects on village level, Moluccans from the Netherlands supported their relatives

²⁴ Steijlen 2010.

by financing their education or supplying them with tools of trade. Since the 1990s, family houses have been renovated and some Moluccans from the Netherlands have even built houses for themselves in the village of origin or in another more convenient place; some even in Bali.

Along with the continuation and expansion of the development initiatives, Dutch Moluccans began to undertake other levels of connections. As the vast majority of Moluccans in the Netherlands are Christians, the Christian villages benefited most from the development aid projects. In order to nip social issues as a result of inequality between villages in the bud, organizations such as *Rela'69* have consciously looked for ways of distributing their projects between villages which have not been assisted by *kumpulan* in the Netherlands.²⁵

In two ways, the connection with their islands of origin which began in the 1970s can be considered a renewal of their acquaintance with the Moluccas by Dutch Moluccans. First, because it involved younger generations who had no direct personal knowledge of the Moluccas whose knowledge was based on the stories of their parents and the images communicated through the political channels and organizations. Secondly, it was a renewed acquaintance because the most of these introductions were stripped of political concepts. Visitors to the Moluccas might observe the need to improve a bridge or a street, but they could also observe that their uncles were in the police or military, serving the Indonesian state.

The renewed relationship also opened another connection to the Moluccas. With direct connection to the family and village of origin, the urge to learn about the specific history, culture and language of these families and villages grew. This meant a broader interest in the Moluccas compared to the RMS-dominated thinking of earlier years. Dutch Moluccans were inspired to explore the culture in the Moluccas in more depth and they incorporated it into their lives in the Netherlands. A good example of this is names they give their children.

THE GREAT SHOCK AND RETURN TO THE SYMBOLS

The turn of the millennium brought with it a shock when a civil war broke out in the Moluccas. As the authoritarian regime of Suharto ended in May 1998, horizontal conflicts between ethnic or religious groups broke out all over the country; the consequences of a combination of power vacuum and rivalry between power cliques. In December 1999 the wave of conflicts reached the Moluccas. A dispute between a bus driver and a passenger developed into a four-year violent war between Christians and Muslims. The shock was all the greater because Moluccans in the Netherlands believed that the relationship between Muslims and Christians in Maluku was very strong, founded on the specific relationships between villages known as *Pela* bonds. *Pela* bonds are relationships created by the ancestors insist that villagers should always help each other. The shock was immense because Moluccans

²⁵ *Rela'69* 1982.

in the Netherlands were not well informed about the actual situation on the ground in the Moluccas, where the traditional systems, including the Pela, had been in decline since the central Indonesian government had imposed new administrative structures.²⁶

By this time, the digital nerve between the Moluccas and the Netherlands allowed developments in the conflict in the Moluccas to be followed almost immediately in the Netherlands. Family members in the Moluccas acted as field reporters for Moluccans in the Netherlands. As in every conflict, one problem was how to sift fake news from what was really happening. Rumours about the burning of churches or attacks on a village could trigger tensions within the Moluccan community in the Netherlands, where just 2.5 percent of the community consisted of Muslims compared to 50 percent in the Moluccas. In order to fight mis-information a special organization, Infodoc Maluku, was established to check information and spread what had been checked and found to be reliable.

Interestingly, the overall reaction among Moluccans in the Netherlands was to try to overcome hostilities and to give a signal to the Moluccas that Islam and Christianity could pass through the same door. Indisputable examples of this were silent processions by organizing which Moluccans in the Netherlands tried to attract attention to what was happening in the Moluccas, where they always tried to ensure a procession was led by a Muslim and a Christian Moluccan; a pairing which was intended to stress that both believers should stand together. Another example was the emergence of an organization called "Women for Peace in Maluku". This organization was led by Vera Mustamu-Tentua, the wife of a well-known pastor, and Farida van Bommel-Pattisahusiwa, a well-known Moluccan Muslim. The "Women for Peace in Maluku" was founded during the *kerusuhan* but continued its endeavours after that to link people of both religions in the Netherlands and in the Moluccas.²⁷

During this crisis, the "political agenda" was set aside and priority shifted to ending the conflict. The main response in the early days of the conflict was that topics like the RMS and separatism were set aside for later concern. The most important matter at that stage was to end the conflict. Although most of the Moluccans in the Netherlands supported this idea, it was challenged by developments in the Moluccas. The first test was the entry into the Moluccas and the conflict arena of the Laskar Jihad. The arrival of the Laskar Jihad, a fundamentalist, radical Muslim group changed the proportions of the conflict. Through its leader, Jafar Umar Thalib, it had connections with the Islamic struggle in Afghanistan where he had fought as a Mujahadin. It also had connections to Indonesian power elites. One issue which has still not been satisfactorily dealt with was how members of Laskar Jihad and weapons could have been easily be transported to the Moluccas at a time the

²⁶ See for example: Leolita Masnun (2022) for changes in the administrative structures; D. Bartels (1990: Chapter 6); Steijlen 2001a.

²⁷ Steijlen 2001a.

president, Abdurachman Wahid, had forbidden such transports. For a moment it looked as if Moluccans from the Netherlands could be part of the political process happening in the Moluccas. In October 1999, shortly before he became president, Wahid with his predecessor B.J. Habibie and General Wiranto, had welcomed a delegation of Dutch Moluccans among them members of the RMS government.²⁸ However, the momentum passed.

The entry of the Laskar Jihad was followed in 2000 by a “re-proclamation” of the RMS: the RMS-FKM (RMS-Front Kedaulatan Maluku, RMS-Moluccan Sovereignty Front). This time the religious affiliation of the RMS was conspicuously present in the red colour of the bandanas of the people who joined Alex Manuputty, the man who had re-proclaimed the RMS. Red was the colour chosen to represent Christians; Muslims used white. The appearance of the Laskar Jihad in the conflict arena caused an upheaval. Some Moluccans who had never been involved in or supported the RMS now turned to it as they thought this offered the only way out of the conflict.²⁹

In the Netherlands the developments in the Moluccas were, as said, less interesting. But the feeling of bonding with the Moluccas was publicly expressed in demonstrations and processions. Regular claims made during these processions were that the Dutch government should take notice of their demands. This time something remarkable happened. Instead of trying to test the “temperature” of the Moluccan community, the Dutch press wanted to know what the third-generation Moluccans would do if the prime minister, whom they asked to address the issue internationally, did not deliver? It seemed as if the Dutch press was being haunted by the trauma of the radical actions in the mid-1970s: when Moluccans were so angry they did not eschew violence. What I observed is that the journalists were no longer interested in the voice of Moluccans but in the voice of the oppressed and, most of all, the “radical”. My interpretation is that at that time the press created the more radical organizations because this was the reaction it was after.³⁰

What were the repercussions of the re-proclamation of the RMS and the support for it in the Netherlands and for a while in the Moluccas?³¹ One effect of the at least temporary revival of the RMS in the Moluccan islands was that ideas surrounding this political ideal revived in the Netherlands. The visibility of RMS protagonists in the Moluccas convinced some in the Netherlands that the political ideal was still alive in the home islands. Symbols related to the RMS, especially its flag, emerged far more frequently in the Moluccan public domain in the Netherlands. Some of the actions in which the RMS flag and the situation in the Moluccas figured were not necessarily linked to the separatist political idea. Since the first half of the last century, around the date of 12 April an annual rally of up to several hundred Moluccan motorists, known

²⁸ Smeets and Steijlen (2006: 347).

²⁹ Steijlen 2005; Smeets and Steijlen (2006: 340-343).

³⁰ Steijlen 2000.

³¹ During the conflict, some of the Christian population in the Moluccas supported the renewed RMS movement. When I visited the Moluccas again after 15 years, the support was no longer as strong. The RMS tended to be considered more a blot on the landscape than a political ideal.

as the “Ride out Peringatan” (Remembrance Ride out) has been an interesting example. The date was chosen to commemorate the execution of Dr Soumokil, the second RMS president, by the Indonesian government, in 1966. The Ride out passes through several Moluccan wards where the motorists stop to pay tribute to Moluccan political prisoners in Indonesia and those who passed away while hoisting the RMS flag and singing the RMS anthem, *Hena Masa Waja*. The RMS flag is prominently displayed in the procession of motors and in the wards which are visited. One of the purposes of the Ride out is to collect money to support the families of Moluccan political prisoners in Indonesia and pay their lawyers. It would be fair to argue that these rallies are politically motivated, however their principal purpose is to draw attention to the issue of freedom of speech. The political prisoners for whom support is sought have been imprisoned because they have hoisted, possessed or displayed RMS flags, a forbidden act in Indonesia.³² The main issue here is freedom of expression. The majority of Moluccans in the Netherlands find it incomprehensible that a flag cannot be displayed because in the Netherlands they have become accustomed to another freedom of expression than that upheld in Indonesia.³³

In the last few decades, actions in the Netherlands featuring RMS flags to signify the relationship with the Moluccas and political aspirations have been growing, notwithstanding the discrepancy in the significance of the RMS flag in the Netherlands and Indonesia. At many events in the Netherlands, somebody who attends waving the RMS flag can be increasingly joined by those brandishing the Morning Star, the flag of Free Papua. The flag-bearers join forces to give vent to the idea that Indonesia is exploiting the Moluccas and Papua and that both territories deserve their independence. The flags also appear at demonstrations like the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 after the killing of George Floyd in the USA but drawing attention to racism in the Netherlands. In 2021, during Covid restrictions, groups of Moluccans carrying RMS flags appeared in the Moluccan wards to commemorate the RMS proclamation as an alternative to the annual RMS meeting which would have been organized in normal times. These flag parades were filmed and posted on social media, which made for some impressive viewing. They were not limited to Moluccan wards, in the cities of Rotterdam and Amsterdam they were organized as a kind of flash mobs coming from different corners of the square. Although the flag-wavers in the Netherlands feel connected to their kin in the Moluccas, their tools of communication differ.

³² RMS flags are hoisted annually in the Moluccas and, if the perpetrators are caught, they are jailed and, in many cases, imprisoned far away from the Moluccas. Most people know about the action in 2007 when the RMS flag was displayed on the occasion of the visit to Ambon, the capital of the Moluccas, by the Indonesian president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, for National Family Day (*Hari Keluarga Nasional*). During an event a group of 40 Moluccans dancers unfurled the RMS flag in front of the president while performing a traditional warrior dance.

³³ Steijlen 2022.

NEW APPROACHES AND COOPERATION

Since the conflict a new broad spectrum of initiatives for cooperation between the Moluccan community in the Netherlands and those in the Moluccas emerged. Interestingly, there has been a shift in positions in which Moluccans in the Moluccas took more control than they had done earlier. The reason is that, for a long time, the ideas of the Moluccans in the Netherlands had played a leading role in deciding what was important. As we shall see, Moluccans in the Moluccas, and elsewhere in Indonesia, are now taking the lead. At the same time, there have been projects which have depended on specific knowledge or access to resources for which the Moluccans in the Moluccas have needed the Dutch Moluccans. This is the point at which to cast an eye over some projects which have been developed since the beginning of this century.

Education has been an important topic addressed by cooperation projects set up the last decade. One prominent example is *Tiga Batang Air* (Three Water Streams, TBA) set up among other people by Tete Siahaya, one of the activists who occupied the residence of Indonesian embassy in August 1970 and has written several books about the history of Moluccans in the Netherlands.³⁴ The goal of his organization is to help youngsters from the villages in Ceram to enter higher education in Ambon. TBA was founded in 2004 because they felt compelled to help rebuild the Moluccas after the destruction caused by the *kerusuhan*.³⁵ To raise money for the organization, among other efforts Siahaya has published books and sold T-shirts, and with success. His books are welcomed by the community in the Netherlands, not only because he is a well-known personality, but also because his writings strike a resounding chord with the experiences of his peers. TBA is just one example of an educational project.

Other, more recent, examples of educational projects are *Bahasa Basudara* and *Buku voor Aboru*. Interestingly, these projects are international, that is, not only the preserve of the Netherlands-Moluccas, as support for and initiatives to do with the projects have come from Moluccans in diaspora and not in the Netherlands. *Bahasa Basudara*³⁶ was an initiative of Jeff Malaihollo who lives in Britain. After conversations with family and friends in the Moluccas, he realized that their lack of mastery of the English language was a stumbling-block to having access to international education. He therefore launched an online platform on which Moluccans from all over the world could teach young Moluccans English. This developed into an online platform and network offering a diverse selection of courses with Moluccan tutors from over the whole world. Very similar in its aims is *Buku voor Aboru* (BvA), set up in 2020.³⁷ BvA is an initiative of John Nahumury who lives in Jakarta. The village of Aboru has a reputation as one of the places in which the RMS

³⁴ Tete Siahaya 2016, 2019.

³⁵ Available at: <http://www.tigabatangair.nl/>; accessed on: 1-9-2022.

³⁶ Available at: <https://www.bahasabasudara.org/>; accessed on: 1-9-2022.

³⁷ Available at: <https://www.titainaama.org/en/>; accessed on: 1-9-2020, and interview with John Nahumury, Jakarta, 17-6-2022.

flag is regularly hoisted. In 2020 a demonstration in which many children participated was organized in the village in support of the RMS. BvA was set up to give the younger generation alternative chances through education. Bringing schoolbooks to Aboru plus educational support should help to give the younger generation options to enter higher education and, at the same time, help to change the image of the village. BvA is supported by Moluccans all over the world, including the Netherlands, as well as NGOs working on education in the Moluccas, like Heka Leka and Pohon Sagoe, an NGO set up by former members of Heka Leka.³⁸

Heka Leka is an interesting NGO in the field of transnational relations. It was founded in 2009 by Ambon-based Stanley Ferdinandus who wanted to support the development of Moluccans in the Moluccas through education. When he was planning to set up his organization, he consciously began to look for support in the Netherlands as he felt that he could build a stronger organization with the support of Dutch Moluccans.³⁹ Ferdinandus' initiative is a striking example of the change in attitude of Moluccans from the Moluccas. Although Ferdinandus looked for support in the Netherlands, it was he who took the initiative and controlled the way he wanted to organize his project. It was the same story with people like John Nahumury in Jakarta. However, it would be too much to say that that the relationship is fully equal. Moluccans who are active in NGOs in the Moluccas still feel a sense of paternalism in their dealings with Dutch Moluccans or Dutch people married with Moluccans.⁴⁰

Besides education, another topic which is growing in importance is environmental issues, sometimes combined with worries about the economic survival of Moluccans in the Moluccas. One of the oldest Dutch Moluccan NGOs working in what was earlier called "development aid" projects is TintanE.⁴¹ The origin of TintanE lies in the NGO Rela'69 which was set up in 1969 to organize support for the Moluccas from the Moluccan community in the Netherlands. At that time this was an innovation. There were some aid-connections with the villages of origin maintained by the earlier mentioned *kumpulan*, but beyond this close relationship aid was considered politically – that is, RMS-related – undesirable. In 2000 Rela'69 merged with TintanE. Like Rela'69, the focus of TintanE is on poverty eradication and the NGO explicitly avoids working only with Christian villages. This is an important decision given the fact that most of the Moluccans in the Netherlands are Christians. This makes access to Christian villages easier but with the risk that they are favoured over Muslim villages. The latest TintanE projects have focused on sustainable agriculture, like the sustainable cultivation of nutmeg and cloves. In helping to improve the cultivation by using trough-drying machines and traditional systems of cultivation control, TitanE aims to be awarded sustainability certificates for the nutmeg and clove crops,

³⁸ Interviews with several people involved May-June 2022.

³⁹ Lieke Hazelhoff 2019.

⁴⁰ Interview with anonymous, in Ambon, 5-6-2022.

⁴¹ Hazelhoff 2019.

guaranteeing better payments for the small farmers.⁴² TitanE has taken the lead in these projects, contributing technological knowledge and offering connections with organizations which promote sustainability and fair trade. It works closely with the Pattimura University in Ambon and other NGOs. Compared to the early years of Rela'69, quite a while ago now, TintanE has already evolved into a professional organization.

Other examples of transnational cooperation working on sustainability are projects like Happy Green Islands, an initiative of Kees Lafeber, a Dutchman married to a Moluccan woman in the Netherlands. In 2014 Happy Green Islands began to raise awareness of waste in the village of Haria on Saparua and slowly broadened its scope to the whole of Saparua and beyond. Taking their place alongside this Dutch-based project are more initiatives in the Moluccas dealing with sustainability and waste in which Dutch Moluccans have also been invited to participate. Among them are the Green Moluccas of Ineke Sohilit⁴³ and her husband and Moluccas Coastal Care,⁴⁴ both NGOs which educate younger generations about environmental issues and organize events like planting new mangrove trees to protect the coasts of the islands.

By and large, projects like these are directed towards improving the living conditions in the Moluccas. Since the turn of the millennium there have also been projects which function as source of cultural inspiration for Moluccans in the Netherlands. Artists go to the Moluccas to put on theatre or make music, among them Boi Akih, a jazz/world music trio with vocalist Monica Akihary, and actors of the Moluccan theatre ensemble Delta Dua who have performed together with the Molucca Bamboowind Orchestra of Rence Alfons in the village of Tuni.⁴⁵ Others go to the moluccas to learn how to play the *tifa* (traditional drum) or the *totobuang* (traditional music instrument with bowls).⁴⁶ Others look for inspiration in Moluccan traditional stories and in what they preserving to be the original culture, like the organization *Building the Baileo*.⁴⁷ The impact of these cultural and musical quests was very much in evidence in two exhibitions, Awareness Moluccan Identity (AMI), organized by a group of young Moluccan artists and performers in 2018 and 2021. They call themselves a platform of artists and creative minds with Moluccan roots who are searching for a deeper awareness of their Moluccan culture and identity.⁴⁸ In the exhibitions, for instance, they told stories about their connection with the Moluccas and authentic tattoo patterns were transferred to artefacts like the Moluccan drum the *tifa*.

⁴² Available at: <https://titane.nl/campaigns/pala-banda-adoptie-10000kg-nootmuskaat/>; accessed on: 1-9-2022.

⁴³ Available at: <https://greenmoluccas.id/>; accessed on: 1-9-2022; Hazelhoff 2019.

⁴⁴ Available at: https://www.instagram.com/moluccas_coastal_care/ and <http://www.tifamagazine.com/mari-ba-iko-ambon-banda-tot-aru/>; accessed on: 1-9-2022.

⁴⁵ From and to Infinity, available at: <https://www.boiakih.com/portfolio-item/from-and-to-infinity/>; accessed on: 1-9-2022.

⁴⁶ See also Wigard 2022.

⁴⁷ Available at: <https://buildingthebaileocom.wordpress.com/author/buildingthebaileo/>; accessed on: 1-9-2022.

⁴⁸ Available at: <https://awarenessmoluccanidentity.com/>; accessed on: 1-9-2022.

TRANSNATIONAL LEVELS

What we have been able to observe over the last ten to-fifteen years is a new range of transnational connections between Moluccans in the Netherlands and the Moluccas. The politically motivated connection is still there, expressed through flag performances and protests about the lack of freedom of speech in Indonesia/the Moluccas as well as voicing concerns about the exploitation of the Moluccas by Indonesia. These combine two different groups which use the flag, an act which is very sensitive politically in Indonesia. One group is composed of those Moluccans in the Netherlands who are concerned about freedom of expression in the Moluccas but do not embrace separatism. For them, the four colours of the RMS flag stand for Moluccan identity and their feelings of belonging to their kin in the Moluccas. The second group favours more independence for the Moluccas, motivated by the history of their grandparents who came to the Netherland and were supporters of the RMS. They still advocate the same political ideal because they are convinced that the roots of the departure of their grandparents lay in the conflict between the RMS and the Indonesian Republic. At the same time, this does not prevent them for participating in other contemporary transnational projects like Bahasa Basudara. Political issues related to the RMS are not generally discussed because the topic is considered too sensitive and, when they visit the Moluccas, they will probably avoid wearing the RMS colours. In part this is a continuation of the earlier political relationship in which Moluccans in the Netherlands moved from support to vicarious nationalism.

The transnational relations between Moluccans in the Netherlands and the Moluccas have also changed in their respective attitudes. Moluccans in the Moluccas are now more empowered and consequently have been less impressed by the Moluccans from the Netherlands. The Moluccans in the Moluccas have found ways of dealing with the Moluccans in the Netherlands and using them to strengthen their own initiatives; Heka Leka is a prime example. The initiators of the Buku voor Aboru and the Bahasa Basudara projects also knew how to mobilize Moluccans in the Netherlands and beyond. Interestingly, these projects have created new imagined communities: Moluccans from all over the world are joining together to work towards improving the situation in the Moluccas. The boundaries of the community are not limited to the Netherlands and the Moluccas but include the Moluccan diaspora in Britain, the USA, and Australia, as well as in Indonesia itself. In the Aboru case, the efforts to support the village of origin has even led to ideas of an Aboru sedunia, Aborunees all over the world, connecting people with roots in Aboru in the Netherlands, Jakarta, Surabaya, West Papua, the USA, and other places.

The development of the transnational relations has been heavily influenced by new technologies, the Internet and social media, but also by changing infrastructures and transportation networks. Commencing with the latter, compared to the situation in the 1950s the possibilities to travel to the Moluccas have changed dramatically. There is more air traffic, air fares have fallen and

people have more money to spend. Saving money for trips to the Moluccas has also become a part of the mindset of Moluccans. Even more important has been the impact of new technology and social media. During the *kerusuhan* between 1999 and 2003, emails and messages from mobile phones had already created a sense of directness. In emails Moluccans in Ambon told their relatives that they heard rumours of attacks. After checking what was happening, new emails were sent to keep the relatives informed. Moluccans in the Netherlands almost felt that they were a presence in the developments in the Moluccas.⁴⁹

Since then, technology has gone ahead by leaps and bounds and shrunk the world. Social media have not only offered the transnational projects an efficient outlet, they can also reach out to more people than analogue media was ever able to do. But most importantly, the digital world offers the opportunity to establish new transnational communities, bringing together Moluccans from all over the world, as the Bahasa Basudara and BvA projects have shown. This ease of contact not only pushes the transnational relationships towards evolving into broader communities, it also helps to break down the sometimes unequal relationship between Moluccans in the Netherlands and those in the Moluccas. As more different groups of Moluccans are now involved, it is no longer a relationship between Moluccans in Netherland and the Moluccas, but also Moluccans elsewhere in the west and in Indonesia.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article has taken the form of a discussion of the transnational relationship between Moluccans in the Netherlands and those still in the Moluccas. Although the arrival of the Moluccans in the Netherlands, signalling their departure from their community in the Moluccas, was triggered by political developments, the first and most continuous transnational relationship between them and the Moluccas took shape in the form of *kumpulan*, organizations based on villages of origin. The first *kumpulan* had already been set up in the early 1950s and acted as representatives of the “community back home”. For more than seventy years, the *kumpulan* continued to represent the bonds between people from the same village or island and Moluccans living in the Netherlands. They were also the organizations through which material support and development aid was organized.

A politically motivated or politically tinged transnational relationship, inseparable from the political ideal of an independent South Moluccan Republic, also dated from the first arrival of Moluccans in the Netherlands. As we have seen, for a long time this relationship was defined by a political dimension: the ideal of an independent South Moluccan Republic. The character of that transnational relationship has changed over time. Moluccans in the Netherlands felt connected with the Moluccans in the Moluccas through belonging to the same imagined community. After the RMS movement in the Moluccas was crushed by the Indonesian army which captured its leaders, the transnational relationship resembled what Anderson has called long-distance

⁴⁹ In Steijlen 2001a I called it a “digital nerve”.

nationalism. The political transnational relationship revived after a new RMS movement emerged in the Moluccas during the conflict between 1999 and 2003. Although the reason for this new political transnational relationship was different to the earlier one because it was embedded in the recent conflict and not the proclamation of 1950, in a sense it was a continuation of a long-distance nationalism because its significance was mainly defined by Moluccans in the Netherlands. The visual expression this transnational relationship, RMS flags, in the Netherlands is looked askance in the Moluccas. It is virtually impossible to discuss how this affects Moluccans in the Moluccas and Moluccans in the Netherlands because of sensitivity generated by issues connected to separatism in Indonesia.

After the politically motivated meaning of the transnational relationship ebbed away in the 1970s, a multi-directional relationship in which Moluccans from the Netherlands work together with Moluccans in the Moluccas to improve living conditions in the Moluccas developed. Interestingly, we have been able to see how positions of both communities have changed over time. Initially it was the Moluccans in the Netherlands who were in control. The relationship was not a fully equal one. Much changed after the conflict in the Moluccas abated and after Moluccans living elsewhere, not just in the Netherlands or the Moluccas, became involved. Although even today there are project in which Moluccans in the Moluccas feel that the Dutch partners are still dominant, most cooperation is becoming more evenly balanced. An important factor contributing to this might be that the transnational relations are restricted less and less to relations between the Netherlands and the Moluccas. In a growing number of projects, the Moluccans involved come from all over the world and Indonesia, creating a more truly transnational Moluccan community. The existence of and experiences in these transnational cooperations is definitely influencing the further developments in the “two-party relationship” which originated in the 1950s.

REFERENCES

- Bartels, D. 1990. *Ambon is op Schiphol; Socialisatie, identiteitsontwikkeling en emancipatie bij Molukkers in Nederland*. Leiden/Utrecht: COMT/IWM.
- Bootsma, P. 2015. *De Molukse acties; Treinkapingen en gijzelingen 1970-1978*, Amsterdam: Boom.
- Bosscher, D. and B. Waaldijk. 1985. *Ambon eer & schuld; Politiek en pressie rond de Republiek Zuid-Molukken*. Weesp: Van Holkema & Warendorf.
- Buchheim, Eveline, Ody Dwicahyo, Fridus Steijlen, and Stephanie Welvaart. 2022. *Sporen vol betekenis. In gesprek met “Getuigen & Tijdgenoten” over de Indonesische onafhankelijkheidsoorlog / Meniti Arti. Bertukar makna bersama “Saksi & Rekan Sezamen” tentang perang kemerdekaan Indonesia*. Amsterdam: AUP; Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia.
- Chauvel, R. 1980. “Ambon’s other half; Some preliminary observations on Ambonese Moslem society and history”, *Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs* (June): 40-80.

- Chauvel, Richard. 1990. *Nationalists, soldiers and separatists; The Ambonese islands from colonialism to revolt 1880-1950*. Leiden: KITLV Press.
- Hazelhoff, Lieke. 2019. *Building bridges between the Netherlands and the Moluccas; Development Projects in the Transnational Relations between the Netherlands and the Moluccas*. Master thesis, Universiteit van Amsterdam.
- Heshusius, C.A. 1978. *KNIL cavalerie 1914-1950; Geschiedenis van de cavalerie en pantsertroepen van het Koninklijk Nederland-Indische Leger (KNIL)*. Den Haag: Koninklijke Landmacht, Sectie Krijgsgeschiedenis.
- Ijzereef, W. 1984. *De Zuid-Celebes affaire; Kapitein Westerling en de standrechtelijke executies*, Dieren: De Bataafsche Leeuw.
- Masnun, Leolita. 2022. *Contentious politics in a remote area of the Moluccan Archipelago, Indonesia*. PhD thesis, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.
- Mee, Tonny van der and Domingo Tomasouw. 2005. *Andere verhalen. Molukkers in Nederland met een andere aankomstgeschiedenis of beroepsachtergrond dan de KNIL-groep van 1951*. Utrecht: Moluks Historisch Museum.
- Metiarj, Mellie. 2021. *Gedwongen reis, mijn vader dominee S. Metiarj*. Assen: Koninklijke Ven Gorkum.
- Oostindie, Gert and Fridus Steijlen. 2021. "Ethnic 'Ferociousness' in Colonial Wars; Moluccans in the Dutch Army in Indonesia, 1945-1949", *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 177: 491-523.
- Penonton, Bung (Pseud. G. Knot), 1977. *De Zuidmolukse Republiek*, Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn
- Redactieteam Gedenkboek. 1989. *35 jaar Geredja Indjili Maluku; "Een wonderbaarlijke spijziging"*. Utrecht: GIM.
- Rela'69. 1982. *Verslag van een identificatiereis 1981*. Amsterdam: Rela'69.
- Siahaya, Tete. 2016. *Het mystieke Driestromengebied van de Tala, Eti en Sapalewa (Tiga Batang Air)*. Tiga Batang Air.
- Siahaya, Tete. 2019. *Iko Beta 15.07.2017>15.02.2019*. Tiga Batang Air.
- Smeets, Henk and Fridus Steijlen. 2006. *In Nederland gebleven. De geschiedenis van de Molukkers 1951-2006*. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker/MHM.
- Steijlen, Fridus. 1996a. *RMS: van ideaal tot symbool; Moluks nationalisme in Nederland 1951-1994*. Amsterdam: Spinhuis.
- Steijlen, Fridus. 1996b. "Hostage-taking actions by Moluccans in the Netherlands", *Ethnos-Nation* 4-4: 97-111.
- Steijlen, Fridus. 2000. "The making of the Vrije Molukse Jongeren", in: *NRC Handelsblad*, 16 september.
- Steijlen, Fridus. 2001a. *Kerusuhan; Het misverstand over de Molukse onrust*. Utrecht: Forum.
- Steijlen, Fridus. 2001b. "To talk them out is to talk them out is to shoot them out is to ...; A critical analysis of 'the Dutch approach' to Moluccan terrorists", *Netherlands' Journal of Social Sciences* 37(1): 38-51.
- Steijlen, Fridus. 2005. "Penanda lama untuk ideologi baru, RMS dan konflik Maluku", in: Jamil Gunawan, Sutoro Eko Yunato, Anton Birowo, and Bambang Purwanto (eds), *Desentralisasi, globalisasi dan demokrasi lokal*, pp. 97-116. Jakarta: LP3ES.

- Steijlen, Fridus. 2010. "Moluccans in the Netherlands; From exile to migrant", *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 44-1: 143-162.
- Steijlen, Fridus. 2015. "In and out of uniform; Moluccan soldiers in the Dutch colonial army", in: Eric Storm and Ali Al Tuma (eds), *Colonial soldiers in Europe, 1914-1945; "Aliens in unifor" in wartime societies*, pp. 229-240. London: Routledge.
- Steijlen, Fridus. 2022. "Pembungkaman kebebasan berbicara, jarak yang membatasi Maluku, 1951-2021". [Forthcoming.]
- Wigard, Nanneke. 2022. "De veelzijdige Yopi Abraham", *Marinjo* No. 6: 22-24.
- Wigard, Nanneke and Jim Worung. 2021. *Ombak Maluku. Molukkers ongewild naar Nederland*. Stichting Ombak Maluku/MalukuXperience.
- Wittermans, T. 1955. "Het begrip communicatie-basis bij de analyse van communicatie-problemen", *Mens en Maatschappij* 30(6): 372-389.
- Wittermans, T. 1991. *Social organisation among Ambonese refugees in Holland*. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis.